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Title : Statement regarding situation in Lebanon and evacuation of Indian Nationals.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Prime Minister has offered to make a statement on a very important matter.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, hon. Members are aware of the current situation in Lebanon. Taking into account the concern that Members may have on this score, I rise to apprise the House of the current situation and our responses to the evolving situation, especially the efforts made by us to aid and assist Indian nationals who have become victims of the escalating crisis in Lebanon.

West Asia is our extended neighbourhood and tensions in that region affect our security and our vital interests. We are seriously concerned about the escalation of the conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah extending across the Lebanon-Israel border. These developments have inflamed an already tense and delicate situation in the region.

On July 12, India had condemned the abduction of two Israeli soldiers by the Hezbollah cadres and called for their immediate release. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Please keep quiet. Show respect at least to the Prime Minister of the country.

...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Please come quietly. You are welcome. I am very happy that you have come back.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Simultaneously, we had condemned in the strongest possible terms the excessive and disproportionate military retaliation by Israel. We

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had particularly expressed concern that the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces had resulted in the killing and suffering of innocent civilians, including women and children that is likely to exacerbate an already tense situation. We also condemn the attacks that led to the deaths of four United Nations Observers in Lebanon.

India had also condemned the wholly unjustified arrest and continuing detention of Ministers of the Palestinian National Authority and members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. There can be no justification whatsoever for taking such action against the duly elected representatives of the Palestinian people.

The virtual destruction of a country which has been painfully rebuilt after two decades of civil war, can hardly be countenanced by any civilized state. In response to the appeal issued by the Government of Lebanon, I would like to inform the House that the Government of India has decided to contribute Rs.10 crore to humanitarian and relief efforts to rebuild Lebanon.

In our view, there should be an immediate cease-fire so that the destruction of Lebanon is ended and humanitarian assistance could be provided. All sides must immediately halt the violence and give diplomacy a chance. Diplomacy to succeed should have a long-term solution that involves and addresses the legitimate concerns of all parties in the region, leading to a comprehensive and negotiated solution.

The safety and welfare of Indian nationals who were residents in that country has been our foremost concern. On 17 July, anticipating a further deterioration in the security situation, an advisory was issued to all Indian nationals, particularly those living in Southern Lebanon, to take suitable precautions regarding their personal safety. Consultations were initiated to work out solutions on how to facilitate the return of those of our nationals in Lebanon desirous of doing so. All Indian nationals have been advised to remain in contact with the Embassy of India in Beirut, who has been instructed to render necessary advice and updated information on the evolving situation.

Since Beirut airport remained closed and the land route between Beirut and Damascus was unsecured, it was felt that the best way to evacuate Indian nationals was through Beirut port. Four Indian Naval ships INS Mumbai, INS Brahmaputra, INS Betwa and INS Shakti which were in the Red Sea were redirected to Beirut to assist in the evacuation[KMR16].

The first evacuation effort was undertaken on 21st July, 2006. 598 Indian nationals, and as a humanitarian gesture, nationals from Nepal, Lebanon and Sri Lanka, were evacuated by INS Mumbai from Beirut to Larnaca in Cyprus. From Larcana, Air India arranged two aircraft to ferry the evacuated Indians to Mumbai and Chennai.

A second evacuation out of Beirut was undertaken on 24th July. This comprised 887 people including 784 Indians, 41 from Nepal, 57 from Sri Lanka and five Lebanese nationals. All Indian nationals, and nationals from Nepal and Sri Lanka were airlifted from Larnaca to India and have arrived safely. A third phase of evacuation was completed on 26 th July bringing the total number of those evacuated to 1,870, including 1,687 Indian nationals.

It is our estimate that approximately 12,000 Indian nationals were in Lebanon at the time of the outbreak of hostilities. They are mostly semi-skilled and unskilled workers who were working in farms and factories. Of these, a large number have not indicated their desire to leave Lebanon. Some of them appear to have decided to stay back, others may have been unable to reach Beirut because of the disruption in communications. We have so far received confirmation of the death of one Indian national in an air strike on a glass factory in Bekka valley.

Our Embassy continues to function in Beirut, and is in touch with various organisations and agencies with which Indian nationals were associated. For the time being, our naval vessels will continue to be in the region in case they are required to be used in the service of our nationals. Any further evacuations will be planned taking into account the ground situation in Lebanon.

We also have a contingent of 672 Indian officers and soldiers as part of the UN peace-keeping forces in Lebanon (UNFIL). Our peacekeepers are safe, though currently confined to their barracks.

I would like to place on record appreciation for the efforts of various Ministries, Departments and agencies of the Government for the swift and successful manner in which they have responded to the task of helping our fellow citizens in distress.

SHRI BRAJA KISHORE TRIPATHY (PURI): Compensation to the casualties should be given in your presence. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Acharia, yesterday, I allowed you to raise this matter.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (BANKURA): India is the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: May I earnestly request you. Please sit down. I can only say that this is very unfortunate. When I am requesting you repeatedly, you are not taking your seat. I am very very sorry.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BRAJA KISHORE TRIPATHY: We are very much thankful to the Prime Ministerâ€¦ ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Nothing will be recorded. Only Shri D.V. Sadanand Gowda's statement will be recorded.

(Interruptions) â€¦*

MR. SPEAKER: I am prepared to allow discussion. Nothing will be done now.

...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Only Shri Sadanand Gowda's statement will be recorded. I shall allow the discussion through a Motion. Bring in a notice for Motion. I will not allow this. I will not start the practice of putting questions after a Statement here. Rules do not permit me.

...(*Interruptions*[s17])

MR. SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned till 1.30 p.m.

* Not Recorded

12.25 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till thirty minutes

past Thirteen of the Clock[V18].

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13.34 hrs.

The Lok Sabha re-assembled at thirty-four

minutes past Thirteen of the Clock.

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